

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MINOR PARTIES

REF: A) LONDON 11117; B) LONDON 9726

SUMMARY - WHILE CALLAGHAN HAS DIRECTED MUCH OF HIS ATTENTION TO SECURING THE CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. HE HAS NOT IGNORED THE OTHER MINOR PARTIES. THE FRAGMENTED 10-MEMBER ULSTER UNIONIST BLOC HAS BEEN GIVEN TWO CARROTS -- ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION AND INCREASED REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT -- TO KEEP IT FROM VOTING TO OUST THE GOVERNMENT. THE 13 NATIONALIST MPS WILL BE OFFERED THE PROSPECT OF A NEW DEVOLUTION BILL AS A RATIONALE FOR WITHHOLDING THEIR VOTES FROM THE CONSERVATIVES. TO THE EXTENT THESE INCENTIVES ARE SUCCESSFUL, THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFECTIVE EDGE IN COMMONS WILL BE IN-

CREASED AND THE BARGAINING POWER OF THE LIBERALS REDUCED. END SUMMARY.

1. RECENT REPORTING ON THE GOVERNMENT'S PARLIAMENTARY
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STRATEGY HAS FOCUSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON THE PACT WITH THE LIBERALS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS RENEWAL (REF A). WHILE THE LIBERAL PACT REMAINS VITALLY IMPORTANT TO THE GOVERNMENT, CALLAGHAN HAS ALSO SOUGHT TO ACQUIRE A FORM OF POLITICAL INSURANCE FROM THE OTHER MINOR PARTIES. HIS PURPOSE HAS BEEN TWOFOLD: THE EXISTENCE OF OTHER POLITICAL OPTIONS REDUCES THE LIBERALS'

BARGAINING STRENGTH, PROVIDES A PARLIAMENTARY BUFFER IN THE EVENT THE LIBERAL PACT FAILS AND INCREASES CALLAGHAN'S EFFECTIVE MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT. AS WE HAVE NOTED PREVIOUSLY, THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THE OTHER PARTIES IS A FUNCTION OF THE OPPOSITION'S BASIC DIVERSITY AND HIGHLIGHTS THE CONSERVATIVES' PARLIAMENTARY IMPOTENCE.

2. BECAUSE OF THE UNUSUAL SITUATION IN NI -- CONTINUED VIOLENCE, DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER -- AND THE EXISTING POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION IN THAT PROVINCE -- ALONG SECTARIAN LINES AND WITHIN THE UNIONIST MAJORITY -- THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTACTS WITH NI POLITICAL LEADERS ARE MORE FREQUENT AND INTENSE THAN THOSE WITH ANY OF THE OTHER MINOR PARTIES. FOR SOME MONTHS NOW THE GOVERNMENT HAS HELD OUT THE PROSPECT OF A RETURN OF ADMINISTRATIVE (AS OPPOSED TO LEGISLATIVE) POWER TO ELECTED NI REPRESENTATIVES AND OF AN INCREASE IN NI'S REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT (NI IS PROPORTIONALLY UNDERREPRESENTED BY FROM 4 TO 6 SEATS). WITH THE TWO CATHOLIC MPS FROM NI FIRMLY ON ITS SIDE AND STRONGLY ANTAGONISTIC TO THE TORIES. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SOUGHT TO USE ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION AND INCREASED REPRESENTATION TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE 10 UNIONIST VOTES WOULD GO AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT ON A CONFIDENCE ISSUE. WITH THE SKILLFUL BEHIND-THE-SCENES ASSISTANCE OF ENOCH POWELL, THIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INITIATIVE HAS HAD LIMITED SUCCESS. JAMES MOLYNEAUX, THE LEADER OF THE DISUNITED UNIONIST BLOC IN PARLIAMENT, RECENTLY TOLD THE PRESS (IN AN OFF-THE-RECORD SESSION) THAT THE UNIONISTS DID NOT WISH TO SEE AN EARLY ELECTION, SINCE PROGRESS ON ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION AND ON INCREASED REPRESENTATION WOULD REQUIRE ACTION IN THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. MOLYNEAUX'S PRESS SESSION GOT HIM IN TROUBLE WITH THE LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY, HARRY WEST (NOT AN MP) AND DID NOT REFLECT A CONSENSUS AMONG UNIONIST MPS -- IAN PAISLEY AND TWO OTHER MPS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN EITHER CARROT AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY VOTE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IN A CONFIDENCE SITUATION. AT LEAST FOUR UNIONIST MPS, HOWEVER, WILL VOTE TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT IN POWER, AND THREE OTHERS ARE REGARDED AS UNDECIDED. THIS, OF COURSE, ADDS TO CALLAGHAN'S MARGIN OF SAFETY.

3. THE NATIONALIST PARTIES -- SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP) WITH 11 SEATS AND PLAID CYMRU WITH 3 SEATS -- COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO BRINGING THE GOVERNMENT DOWN FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF THE DEVOLUTION BILL. BUT THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT A NEW DEVOLUTION BILL WOULD FORCE

THE NATIONALISTS TO RECONSIDER THEIR POSITION. THEY

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WANT DEVOLUTION -- ONE SNP LEADER PRIVATELY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT SCOTLAND WOULD ATTAIN INDEPENDENCE FAR MORE QUICKLY IF A SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY CAME INTO EXISTENCE AND THAT IT WOULD ALSO PROVIDE VALUABLE TRAINING FOR THE DAY SCOTLAND BECOMES INDEPENDENT. BUT PERHAPS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, THE NATIONALISTS WOULD BE POLITICALLY DAMAGED IF THEIR ACTIONS WERE SEEN TO HAVE RESULTED IN THE ELECTION OF AN ANTI-DEVOLUTION CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO INTRODUCE A NEW DEVOLUTION BILL (OR BILLS) HAVING A REASONABLE CHANCE OF PASSING -- AND IT SEEMS TO BE BENDING EVERY EFFORT IN THIS DIRECTION -- THE 14 NATIONALIST VOTES WOULD BE NEUTRALIZED. THE LIBERALS, WHO OPPOSED CLOTURE ON THE PREVIOUS BILL, COULD PLAY A DECISIVE ROLE IN DECIDING WHETHER A NEW BILL WOULD GET THROUGH PARLIAMENT.

4. GIVEN ITS CURRENT POLITICAL IMPERATIVES, WE EXPECT TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT MOVE QUICKLY IN THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT TO CONVOKE A SPEAKERS CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF NI REPRESENTATION AND TO INTRODUCE NEW LEGISLATION.

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LATION ON DEVOLUTION FOR SCOTLAND AND WALES, WHILE CONTINUING TO ENCOURAGE NI POLITICAL LEADERS TO WORK OUT A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION IN THAT PROVINCE. THERE IS, ACCORDINGLY, A GOOD CHANCE THIS DEVELOPMENT OF CALLAGHAN'S PARLIAMENTARY STRATEGY WILL BE

SUCCESSFUL. NOW, IF HE CAN ONLY HOLD THE LABOR PARTY TOGETHER. . .

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